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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN AL-TAHRIR ACTIVISTS ARRESTED

REF: AMMAN 05456

1. Jordan's state prosecutor charged three men on September 21 with belonging to the illegal Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party). The three men were arrested in July for distributing leaflets among delegates at the First International Conference of Muslim Scholars, a meeting sponsored by the palace to foster tolerance and the reject extremism (reftel). No date was announced for their trial.

2. Eight Al-Tahrir activists were arrested on charges of holding an illegal rally in a Palestinian area of Amman after prayers on Friday, September 2. Post contacts report that speakers at the rally called for the overthrow of Arab governments, and praised Iraqi insurgents. The most prominent detainee is pharmacist Saleh Al-Chalabi, leader of the Jordanian Al-Tahrir party. According to local press, over 1,000 attended the gathering.

3. Note: In order to operate legally in Jordan, political parties must affirm a commitment to the current constitution. Because it seeks a restoration of the Caliphate, Al-Tahrir is unable to meet this requirement. Its sympathizers here probably number fewer than five thousand. END NOTE

4. Comment: The Jordanian government has periodically detained Al-Tahrir members for short periods, usually for distributing literature. The group has been largely inactive for the past decade, and had been eclipsed by other, more prominent local Islamist groups. Al-Tahrir members have not been accused of plotting violence in Jordan. This months unauthorized mosque rally is a departure from the group's norm.

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